We must speak by the card, or equivocation will undo us.
—*Hamlet*

WHIST · POINTS

And How to Make Them

BY C. R. KEILEY
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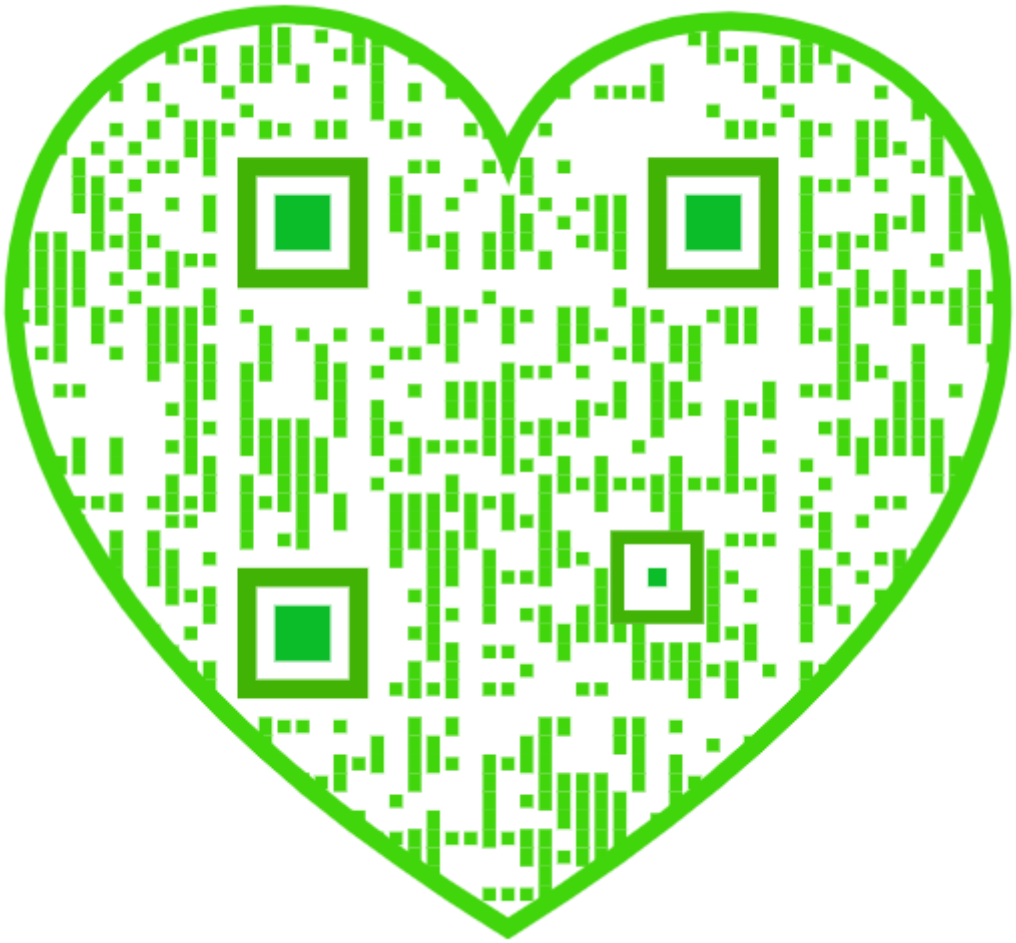

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INTRODUCTORY.

This little book presupposes some knowledge of whist on the part of the reader, and is intended to contain suggestions rather than fiats. There is nothing new in it. The compiler has simply placed before the reader as concisely as possible some of the points of whist which he thinks are of the most importance in the development of a good game. He hopes it may be of assistance to the learner instead of befogging him, as a more pretentious effort might do. There is a reason for every good play in whist. If the manner of making the play is given, the reason for it will occur to every one who can ever hope to become a whist player.

WHIST POINTS.

REGULAR LEADS.

Until you have mastered all the salient points of the game, and are blessed with a partner possessing equal intelligence and information, you will do well to follow the general rule:—Open your hand by leading your longest suit.

There are certain well established leads from combinations of high cards, which it would be well for every student of the game to learn. They are easy to remember, and are of great value in giving information regarding numerical and trick taking strength simultaneously.

ACE.

The ace is led from suits containing, ace-king and three or more small, ace and four or more small, and ace-queen-knave and one or more small.

With the first of these combinations lead ace, then king; from the second lead ace, then original fourth best; with the third lead ace and follow with queen, if suit contains four cards; if five, follow with knave. Even if 10 is with this last combination do not follow ace with it, as you give enough information both as to length and strength by the knave played second, without confusing your partner at all.

KING.

King is led from a suit of *four cards only*, and denotes absolutely the possession of either ace or queen.

If led from ace-king combination follow with ace; if from king-queen, follow with lowest card, provided king wins. If, however, with ace-king you hold queen and small, follow with queen; or queen and knave, follow with knave.

If with king-queen you have knave, lead it second; with knave and 10, lead the 10.

Any of these cards winning after the king, proclaim the rest with you.

QUEEN.

Queen led declares at least five cards in suit, and is led from one of these combinations: Ace-king-queen and two or more others; king-queen and ~~two~~ or more small; queen-knave-10 and two or more small.*

If played from first combination follow with ace, and partner will know you have just five cards; with king, six or more. From the second combination follow with fourth best, providing queen wins.

Though the queen, from queen-knave-10 combination, usually indicates five cards, it is often led from four; and if led from four, queen winning, follow with knave; if from five, follow with 10.

KNAVE.

Knave is led from ace-king-queen-knave and one or more small, and from king-queen-knave and two or more small; and declares absolutely at least five in suit.

With the first combination follow with queen if suit contains seven or more; with king if just six; with ace, if five. With second combination, follow with queen, if you held originally six or more;

* Mr Work recommends 10 lead from this tierce instead of the old lead of 10 from king-knave-10. I do not believe it is likely to be accepted, at all events not immediately.

with king, if five. Even if knave wins always follow with an honor. Knave is frequently, and sometimes with advantage, led from knave-10-9 and two small, but I do not recommend this play with only four in suit.

TEN.

The 10 is led from king-knave-10 and two more. With only four in suit, most of the better players have discarded the 10 lead for fourth best.

NINE.

The 9 is led from ace-queen-10-9, or ace-knave-10-9 and denotes just four in suit, for, with five or more, the lead from this combination would be ace.

In every case in which the foregoing combinations do not occur, play fourth best as an original lead.

The preceding information does not refer to trump leads, as in that case the necessity for making high cards as soon as possible does not obtain. The most advanced players do not lead ace from less than seven trumps, unless coupled with one or more honors, and always lead low from five to ace-king. But with five or more trumps headed by a sequence of three to ace, or three to king, they play the same as in lay suits, as the third round will almost invariably exhaust trumps.

IRREGULAR LEADS.

Many a hand contains a short good suit such as ace-king and small; king-queen and small; queen-knave-10, or some similar combination, with the longest suit possibly a 9 and three smaller. It is usually better in such case to lead from the numerically weaker suit, for if you lead from your longer but weaker suit your partner may lead trumps to help you develop it. This is apt to be the case if he possesses fair trump strength, with one or more re-entry cards and some strength in suit you led. There is less chance for deception here in playing from short suit. If your long suit happens to be four small trumps this lead is always preferable.

As it is of course impossible to open with fourth best from a three card suit, lead your highest, and choose for this lead, if possible, some suit in which you have a sequence. The only exception to the lead of the highest is, when you have ace-king and small, lead king before ace.

If the hand consists of ace-king-queen, follow king with queen, then ace. Having opened with king your partner will read you for four at the most in the suit, and will not be greatly deceived as to length. If followed by queen, which also wins, partner knows you have ace with one or no small.

Never open a suit containing ace-king only as an initial lead. These are very valuable re-entry cards, if your partner has a suit which he desires led to him; or they may effectually block the establishment of an adversary's suit.

The trump card has a considerable effect upon the opening of a hand, as, suppose a king, queen or knave is turned, and you have a fourchette to it; it is almost a sure loss of a trick to lead up to it, no matter how strong you may be in trumps. An irregular lead under these conditions is virtually a request for a trump lead from your partner.

A method of achieving this result, which is frequently played, and is incorrectly called the "Albany Lead," is to play the highest card of a three card suit, say 10 or 9, which marks you with at least four trumps and a hand to which you desire trumps led. The fall of cards and partner's hand will usually show him whether the lead is regular or not.

Foster has a variation of this play which I prefer for several reasons. It is to lead irregularly in your best suit, or at least a suit in which you have a stopper, say an ace or guarded king.* The advantages of this are that, while giving the same information as regards the trump strength, you are not declaring weakness in any specific suit, but are

* A favorite play illustrating this is to lead knave instead of ten from king-knave-10 and smaller.

either strengthening your own best suit, and are retaining at least some strength to retard your adversaries' suit.

In case of queen turned to right, and you as leader have ace-king-knave and others, it is a good play to lead king, then a lay suit. Your partner, as soon as he gets the lead, will play trumps, knowing you have ace certainly, and most probably knave and others.

Whenever there is an honor turned and you make a false lead, your partner will play irrespective of the number of his trumps, a card higher than the turn-up, if he has it. If he has only three trumps he of course plays the highest, and if it wins follows with the next lower; while if he has four he plays the highest and follows with the lowest. Then if he subsequently plays a higher trump he is marked with four.

Irregular leads after the first play are very frequent, and the lead depends very materially on the way cards have fallen. If at fourth hand you have taken a trick in a lay suit very cheaply, the presumption is that your right hand opponent is very weak in that suit. Unless you have some very strong suit to develop, it is a good play to lead up to this declared weakness.

If your partner, at second hand, has taken a trick with knave or 10, it is a good play when you get in to lead that suit, as ace-king cannot be to your left, or the leader would have played one of them. These leads through strength and up to weakness in your adversaries' suits are especially good when you have guarded honors or tenaces in other suits.

An irregular lead in the opening of a hand declares one of two things: either that you have no four card suit worth developing, or that you want your partner to lead trumps through an honor turned.

Regarding turned honors I would say, do not be afraid to lead up to an ace turned, if strong in trumps, as the ace must make in any event.

TRUMP LEADS.

With five trumps in hand it is usually advantageous to open with a trump. So well recognized and approved a feature of play is this that, until very recently "Lead trumps with five" had been regarded as a whist axiom. It is however a bad principle in whist to say "do" or "do not" and follow a fixed rule invariably.

With a hand containing just five trumps, blank in one suit and weak in another, with a strong though not established fourth suit, I regard it as weak play to open with the trump. Unless you find your partner with some trump or lay strength, you may be materially aiding your adversaries. Rather open from your strong suit, and subsequently call for or lead trumps. With five trumps, however, and *all* the other suits weak it is better to lead trumps, for it is a fair presumption that your partner will have something in suits, and your trump hand must help him.

With six trumps or more, irrespective of the rest of the hand, it is better to lead them.

If you have one strong suit and fair re-entry cards in the others, I advocate leading trumps from three or even two ; but the practice of leading a single trump, simply because it is the only one you have, cannot be too heartily condemned.

With five or even four good trumps and one established long suit in your hand, say ace-king-queen and others it is better to lead a high card from this combination and follow with a trump.

If your right hand adversary does not respond to the last lead of trumps from you or your partner, do not stop leading simply because you draw two for one. This is particularly true if your partner had led or called for trumps, or you have enough leading trumps to exhaust them and desire to establish a lay suit.

When at any period of the game you are justified in believing that you and your partner hold command of the lay suits, you should lead trumps irrespective of the number held, providing of course neither adversary has called. An over-cautious game in trumps is usually a losing one. Do not be afraid to lead when the game demands it.

SECOND HAND.

The usual rule is to play low second hand, but there are many exceptions to it. Careful second hand play often decides match games; and there is no other department of whist requiring so much judgment.

The leads, which I have called *regular* (usually denominated as American) together with the established rule of playing fourth best as an initial lead from suits not containing the high card combinations, have greatly simplified the work of the second player. When a card lower than ten is an initial lead, as say 9, 8, 7 etc., the higher cards in that suit which are out, not remaining in leader's hand, can be calculated by deducting the spots on card led from 11. Thus, if 9 is led, there are two cards, 8 led, three; 7, four; etc. It not infrequently happens that second hand has all the cards higher than the lead, barring those remaining in the leader's hand. He would then play his lowest of these lower cards; as, say, with eight led (8 from 11 leaves 3) second hand holds say, aee-queen-10, and possibly others, he plays 10.

With two or more high cards in sequence usually play the lowest of the sequence—thus, with king-queen-knave, to low card led, play knave; queen-knave-10, play 10, whether you have others or not, unless you desire to call. (See Calls and Echoes.)

Holding ace-king with or without others play king second hand.

Holding king-queen, with two or more others, play queen, but if you should have king-queen

only, or king-queen and one, it is occasionly a good play to put on king first, as it may induce leader to finesse on the return of the suit.

Holding ace-king-knave, play king first time.

Ace-queen-knave play knave.

Ace-queen-ten and small, if strong in trumps, play low ; if weak in trumps, or holding more than four in suit, play queen, except on eight led, then play 10.

Holding ace or king, together with 10 or 9 and one small, three in suit, it is usually advantageous to cover 7 or 8 led with the 9 or 10

Holding king-knave ten, play 10.

With king-knave only, play king. (A play discussed frequently between H. N. Low and the writer, and found to be advisable.)

With king or queen and one small, play low, unless 8 or 9 is led ; then play the honor.

TRUMPS.

When trumps are led you must manage second hand somewhat differently. Though your adversaries are leading the trumps it may frequently be to your advantage to have the trumps out, as say you have a strong established suit with fair or good re-entry cards, the sooner trumps are exhausted the better it will be for you. With such a hand, holding ace-king and one or more others, play low second hand. In fact, as a general rule, with ace and king do not play either of them at second hand unless queen is led. But if you have a cross ruff established and your hand contains ace and others, you may not want trumps out, and it is good whist to play your ace on the first lead of trumps, and continue the ruff.

With king or queen and one small in trumps, I advocate playing the honor always at second hand to low card led unless trumps are led in response to a call. Then play low.

When knave is led and you hold ace and others, play ace if the lead is an initlal one from that hand, for the leader probably holds king-queen-knave

with two or more small, and your ace may be subsequently trumped.

With 10 led, holding ace-queen, with or without others, play queen. Holding queen and one, play queen. Queen and others, play low,

Play ace to king or queen or knave led, unless to king led you may, if holding ace-knave and one, pass it.

Play ace to any card led if your hand contains six or more cards of the suit, as on the subsequent lead it may be trumped.

With any fourchette to a high card led (that is the card next higher and next lower) cover the lead: this can not hurt your hand and may either take the trick, or prevent third hand from finessing to advantage. Apply this rule both to trump and lay suits.

THIRD HAND.

The leader's partner has to give information or take tricks. He can always do one or the other of these; sometimes both. It is of the utmost value to the leader to know whether his partner is long or short in his suit; so, even where there is no possibility of blocking the suit, if he has four cards he should show it. The way to do this is, if a card which is a trick taker is led by partner, third hand plays third best instead of lowest, and on the following trick, should he not have to take it, he plays second best. Leader will know, as the lowest has not fallen, and no one has called, that the lowest, with another card, are held by his partner. This may prevent him leading a third time, thus giving one of the opponents an opportunity to trump, and the other to discard.

If on first lead partner plays his lowest, leader can read him for three only at most in suit.

If third hand is expected to take a trick the usual play is highest card, unless holding a high sequence, then play lowest of sequence. This is subject to exceptions, as, with ace-queen, to low card

led, play queen. Ace-queen-knave, play knave. If strong in another suit, and desirous of retaining a sure re-entry card, third hand may sometimes finesse knave from ace-knave ; but under no conditions play knave from king-knave. It is a losing finesse, far oftener than a winning one.

Should third hand take trick it is frequently advisable to return partner's lead rather than open a weak suit. If he should do this with only three cards initially in the suit he returns highest ; if four or more, fourth best. Partner will understand weakness, and will play cautiously.

If partner leads knave initially and you have ace and are strong in trumps, it is usually advisable to take the knave and lead trumps. With ace and one small to either knave or queen led, play ace, and if weak in trumps return the low card. In trumps third hand has considerable liberty of judgment allowed. He cannot lose his high cards, as in lay suits ; and as partner may oftimes be leading from top of three, with a strong hand outside, it may be preferable to finesse even if sure of losing this one trick. It is better to retain some trump strength for subsequent play rather than blank his hand of trumps, and possibly put himself at his opponents' mercy.

If third hand, however, takes trump trick, or at any time takes a trick after partner has led trumps, he should immediately lead a trump if he has one. The exceptions to this are few, and it requires some knowledge of the game to be able to violate this rule without injury.

FOURTH HAND.

Considerable skill is required to play fourth advantageously. It frequently pays to pass a declared trick, as, say you have a very weak hand and could not open any suit without deceiving partner, if the trick is taken to your right, let it alone, and give your partner the advantage of having the play come to him, Or if king is led and you hold ace-knave and one, it is sometimes good play to pass, as it

may happen that the leader, reading ace with his partner, and having apparently a sure established suit, and one other suit fairly good, will lead trumps. If your trump hand is strong, and you have another suit with any strength in it, this may help you materially. If, however, the knave comes to you uncovered, it is rarely good play to remain off, as all good players will follow with an honor, and you may lose your ace by partner trumping the subsequent trick. Knave being led only from five or more, it is very probable some one may be short on second round—your partner just as likely as your adversary.

If second hand has played a fairly high card to trump lead, partner with ace and two or more small, can frequently pass the trick to advantage; as the leader, if his partner does not retain the ace, will read it in the second hand and be tempted to finesse deeply against it, thus giving second hand an opportunity to make a smaller card, say a knave or 10 if he should have it.

It is sometimes good play to take partner's trick. A simple example is when, say an eight is led, second hand plays 10 and holds the trick, fourth hand having queen and one small, three small trumps, and indifferent suit cards, if he plays queen and returns the small one, partner should immediately read the situation, and give him a chance to use a small trump, by ruffing.

Or as a more complex situation: earlier in the game partner has opened a suit, strength in which is declared at his right. If you can read the cards correctly it is very frequently of great advantage to take a trick even if it is your partner's already, and lead through this strength up to your partner.

If there is no very good reason existing why fourth hand should desire not to lead it is his duty to take any trick he can with his lowest trick taking card. Coups at fourth hand are sometimes disastrous, and unless the player is quite advanced they are good things to avoid. If you have placed the

cards correctly, however, do not be afraid to make the most of your information and pick up any stray trick you can by under or over play.

CALLS AND ECHOES.

A call for trumps is made by playing *an unnecessarily high card* and following with a lower. As, say, a trey on king led, followed at any time by the deuce. It was formerly regarded to mean that the party calling not only desired trumps, but could, unaided, make the odd trick. But as in the modern game the two hands are played by the partners as nearly as possible like a unit, the call is simply used to demand trumps and tells partner that the caller is strong in trumps, and has either a suit of his own, or has the ability to help his partner's hand.

Some good players argue that you should never call on an adversary's lead. I cannot agree with them. If your hand demands a trump lead, let your partner know it as soon as possible. Do not call just because you have five trumps, but as a general rule I should say call if you have five trumps and a good lay suit; or five trumps with two honors; or six trumps with one honor. You may call by a single discard, as, should you pass a trick absolutely declared against you, partner should know you wish trumps led. Or should you discard on a doubtful trick a card as high as the 8 partner should lead trumps. Should two suits be led and you play a card to each of these as high or higher than the 8, unless the leads have indicated suits of great length, your partner should know you want trumps.

In line with the call is the echo, showing four or more trumps, to partner's call or lead, and is made by duplicating the trump signal either in lay suits or trumps. If your partner should get the lead and open with a low trump, you taking the trick, the return of your lowest indicates four, or no more, and the drop of the cards will usually show which. If your partner leads from one of the high card combinations in trumps, and you hold four, play your

third best and follow with fourth at the next opportunity. Deliberately forcing your partner after he has called indicates that you possess trump strength, and is equivalent to an echo. If partner passes a doubtful trick and you force him, you declare great trump strength, and it is equivalent to a call.

An opportunity for echoing with high cards is frequently offered and should always be utilized. This, with ace-king and two others, take trick with ace and return king, unless one of the others is queen, then take trick with ace and return queen. This marks you with the king and one or more others. If king-queen and two small, play king, and if it wins return queen, Partner will know you have at least four.

It sometimes happens that, although your partner is numerically strong in trumps and has called, you hold two or more honors. You should endeavor to show as nearly as possible your holding. Thus, with ace-king-queen only, lead king then queen; ace-king-queen and one small, queen, then ace; ace king-queen and two small, lead queen then king. Holding king-queen-knave only, lead king, then queen; king-queen-knave and small, queen, then king. Remember these leads are in response to a call. Otherwise they would show one more. It is not, as I have explained, always necessary to call with five trumps, but it is always obligatory for one partner to echo to the other's call when he has four.

RUFFING.

The general rule is to trump a doubtful trick, if you have only three trumps, and to trump a positively losing trick no matter how many trumps you have. But this general rule does not apply to every specific case. It is usually good whist to trump a doutful trick, with three trumps, because presumably your trumps will be of no value to you either to develop your own or partner's suit. And even should your partner have a card capable of winning

the trick, it is well to retain as much strength as possible in the adversaries' suit. But if your three trumps are strong, say ace-king, or ace-queen, with a small one, and you have a strong or established suit, these trumps are too valuable to use for ruffing.

For the same reason do not invariably trump a trick declared against you. If you should have a hand of, say, four trumps including two honors, with a very strong suit of your own, it would be foolish to lose command of trumps and thereby ruin the chances of establishing your own suit simply to save one or even two tricks by ruffing.

With five trumps it is rarely good play to pass a trick which is positively declared against you. In fact, some strong players have recommended leading a singleton when you have five trumps, and no suit to develop, simply for the object of ruffing. I think this is bad policy, and merely mention it to emphasize the preceding proposition.

If at any stage of the game the opponents have shown trump strength, either by calling or leading, and you have not trumps enough to balk their play, trump promptly any doubtful trick you can, unless the fall of cards prior to this trick has demonstrated quite conclusively that your partner holds the winner, in which case the trick could hardly be called doubtful.

Do not be afraid to trump a trick declared against you because the next player will over-trump; for if you pass the trick you give him the advantage of a discard which may, in fact often does, mean a clear gain of a trick.

If your partner should open a suit by lead of a queen, knave or 10, do not trump it, because these cards are led only from certain high card combinations before mentioned, and your trumping may prevent the establishment of his suit.

This restriction of course applies only while your partner continues leading high cards. Should he at any time lead a low card in the suit it is your duty to trump, if you have refused on a prior trick, as he is deliberately forcing you.

DISCARDS.

The regular rule for discards is to throw away a card of your weakest suit. This however is subject to the following modifications: Should trump strength be declared against you, discard from your best protected suit. This gives direct information as to your best suit, and allows you at the same time to husband whatever strength you may have in your weak suits.

When your partner has led trumps, or declared strength in them, if you have an opportunity to discard—holding one long suit with singly guarded honors in the others, it is better to discard a higher and then a lower card in your long suit rather than unguard your honors, as your partner might not be able to give you your suit. Be careful to remember that this only applies when partner is strong, The reverse is implied when strength is with opponents. When partner leads trumps, and you have two suits which are very weak, discard if possible a card from each.

No matter who has led trumps, the discard of the highest card of a suit proclaims that it is absolutely established in the discarding hand.

The discard of the second best of a suit, unless followed by another, means absolute blankness in that suit. If it is followed by a lower one it signifies all between.

Never discard so as to blank your hand of the suit your partner has shown, unless you can take all the remaining tricks unaided.

It makes no difference who has led trumps your discard should be made on the presumption of declared or implied strength. If it is certain, or even very probable, that you and your partner have equal or nearly equal strength in trumps with your adversaries, your discard should be from weakness, even though the opponents have initiated the trump lead. Mr. Work recommends the discard from weakness at all times, and this is played by both

the Hamilton and Philadelphia clubs. But as it is not generally accepted, it is well to follow the old rule as less likely to cause confusion.

SHIFTING THE SUIT.

If trumps are exhausted, or are declared with your side, should your partner be leading a suit in which you can give him no assistance, and you have a good suit of your own, ask him to change his suit. This you do by playing a higher card followed by lower in suit he is leading.

INFERENCES.

To be able to discover from the cards played what must be in certain hands is necessary to good whist. While you may not be able to place with absolute accuracy at all times the location of certain cards, yet by following the play you can draw fairly correct inferences. These are some easy examples:

A high card falling from any hand with apparently no intention of taking a trick should put you on your guard for a trump call from that hand.

Playing a card as high as an 8 on the initial lead of two suits, or the initial discard of an 8 from an unopened suit, denotes trump strength.

In the trump inferences do not misjudge a cover-card, second hand, for a call.

Second hand, playing queen to low card led, infer either king or no more; or playing king, infer no more; or if more, ace or queen with them (see remark on king-queen, second hand.)

Second hand plays ace to low card led, infer either no more, or very long suit.

If player has an opportunity to ruff and refuses, infer the possession of trump strength.

If partner forces the player, who has refeusd, it is a declaration of strength on part of the forcing partner, and is equivalent to a call.

If fourth hand takes a trick and immediately re turns the same suit, he is either quite strong in the suit or has no more: his partner can usually tell

which, as, supposing second hand to have ace-queen, or ace-knave ; or king-knave with others, it probably means partner is blank.

If third hand returns leader's suit immediately, infer no strong suit is in his hand.

If second hand plays queen to 10 led and takes the trick, infer ace either with him or fourth hand, and leader with king and knave.

If second hand plays king or queen to 9 led, and takes trick, do not infer no more. It is proper to cover 9 with king or queen and one.

If any player should have a fourchette to high card led, the lead is irregular, or if the card should be covered by the next higher, the player holding the next lower knows the lead is false.

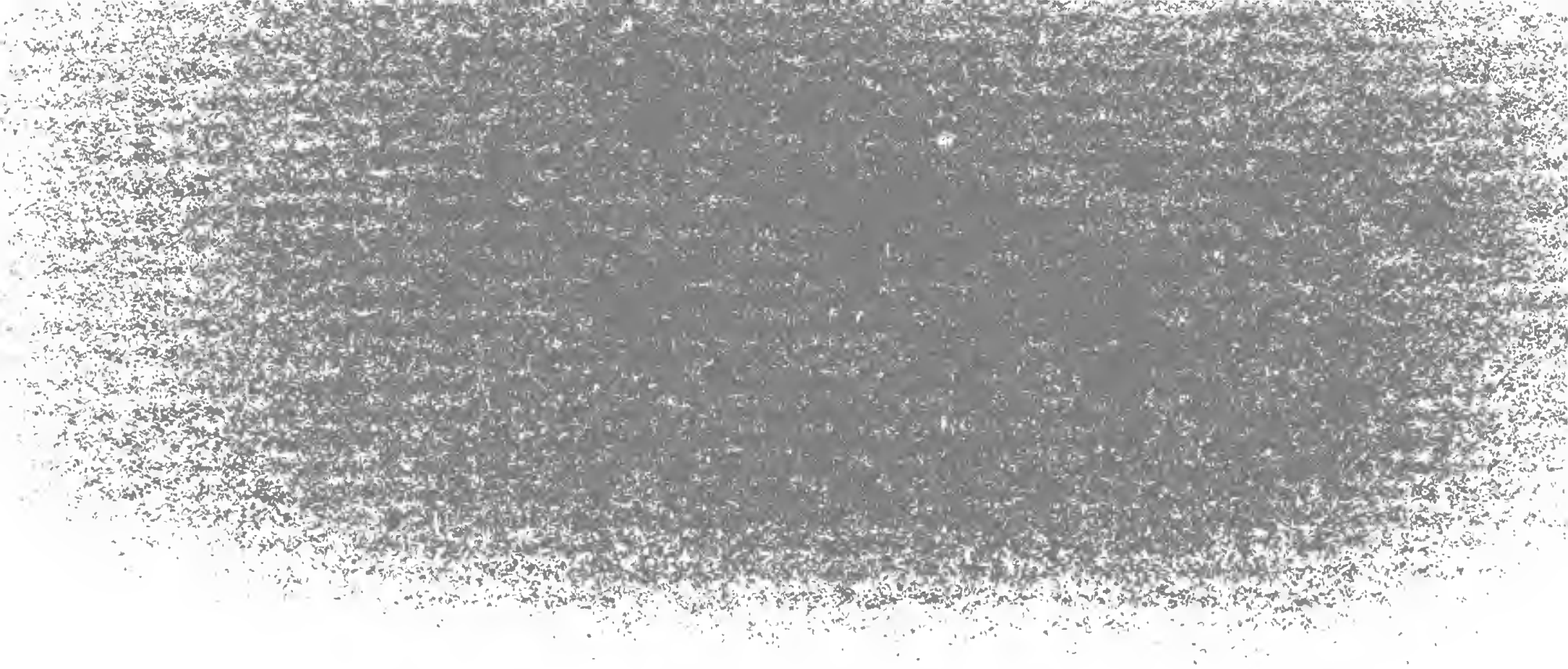
If leader plays a false card initially, with honor turned to his right, it is a trump call. With low trump turned, infer a hand with no good long suit.

If fourth hand takes a trump cheaply, do not infer marked weakness in that hand ; but if a lay trick, the inference is almost absolute.

If partner returns suit with his lowest card, he has two cards remaining, or no more. If the fall of cards leads you to suppose the latter is the case, he wants to trump.

If partner takes trick with king and returns queen it is a demand for trumps. Infer here a hand which would be improved by being led to rather than by leading.

Try to remember when you sit at the table that your partner is just as anxious to win as you are, and will play much better if you trust him. Work the two hands together as much as possible. Information and aid make the modern game of whist.



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